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TOPIC: FISHING

Investigator: Jovilisi T.

INTERVIEWED: Ilimo Tamavudi.....Noco, Rewa.

SUBJECT: THE FISHING IN THE OLDEN DAYS.

When we will go out fishing in the sea, there would be three men in a boat. One man would be in the front, one in the middle and one at the rear.

When a school of fish is sighted, the man at the back would call out to the front man and inform him the position of the fish. They would encircle the position and lay the net onto the water. After that we would go into the water to have the catch.

In our village, when we put our net into the sea, it would be a good catch. None of us would return from the sea-empty-handed. Our village is regarded as the village of the GONE DAU or fisherman. We got special kind of fish to be caught. One of our special fish or IKA NI MASI is the snake. The snake is regarded as our MASI in the village of NAIVILACA.

If the chief wants to have this special fish, he would present some yaqona to request the GONEDAU or fisherman. All the fish which we catch are from one fishing territory

which is called the TAKAI LOALOA. All the fish which is brought from this territory is presented to the chiefs - the Tui Noco.

If all our catch is of the same fish and in all abundant number, all the men who went out for fishing would go and present it to the leaders of the village.

We would put the catch into a big basket and dragged it to the ceremonial arena. When we shall dragged the basket forth we knew at once that the leaders of the village or chiefs would be presenting to us in return the food crop which is called the VIA. This exchange of gifts is a traditional customs which is still practised today. In our village, the number of men living is the same as the number of nets and boats. It is part of our living to be at the sea. Traditionally there is different nets for different catch. For example there will be a special net for catching the GATA or snake. Every house-hold have their own nets.

- Could you tell me how you go about when some fish is needed from the chiefs house hold or for the Tui Noco?

In every village there is a special food which is regarded as the chiefly food. This also applies to the fish which is regarded as the IKA NI MASI or the chiefly fish.

In our village, the GATA or snake is regarded as the chiefly food or fish. If a snake is found or caught, it would be taken at once to the household of the Tui Noco.

The yaqona is also taken to be presented with the snake.

In return the chief concern would present a gifts or sometimes provide a small fish. The fisherman will not demand anything from the chief in return for the catch. The fisherman regarded this as their duty to be done on to their chief. The chiefly fish are often caught at the shallow waters near the village. Men often swim to the fishing territory and used their nets to catch these fish. First of all it is presented to the chiefly household before being taken to their own houses.

- You mentioned about the catching of snake, could you tell me how the ancestors used to catch it?

They used the nets which we are still using it today.

- What do they used in the catching of fish?

They also used a very big long nets. These nets are often used at the entrance of the reefs. At one end of the net, a big long rope is tied which is tied to a big long stick. The net is then lowered to the entrance of the reef.

When the nets is securely placed, we would return home and leave the net for the night. Early next morning we would go to the reef to check at our nets.

Sometimes when we return, we happen to find five big turtles inside the net. At once we would blow our conch to signify that some turtle had been caught.

The turtle is then brought to the village and place in its fence which is erected near the beach. The fence is often

made of bamboo. The turtle is kept there until it is needed for the dish. This kind of turtle - fencing is still prevailing in our village. If there is a ceremony in which the people of NOCO will participate, the turtle would then be brought forth from its fence. When the turtle is requested to be brought forth to any ceremony, the leaders or chiefs of Noco would provide a yaqona drinking ceremony for the fisherman. In this yaqona drinking, only the fisherman would drink, not the chiefs. The chiefs would also provide a small food for the fisherman. This food is namely called the QALU. For the above two items prepared only the fisherman are allowed to eat from it and no one else. This is regarded as the food for the KAI WAI or people of the sea.

- Is there any tabu in regards to any catch of the fish in the sea?

We are the GONEDAU or the fisherman and we do not keep any tabu concerning fishing at the sea. We can catch any fish at any day. It is our daily life-style.

If there is abundant fish caught in a day, we would put some in the fence-pond which is erected near the shore.

When we want to catch some turn, we would be looking for the sign of a sea weed which is called the VUTIA. When we discovered these sea-weeds; we would know that many turtles would come in this place. We would then prepare the net at the opening of the reef. At the mouth of the reef; we would wait for the turtles to come in large numbers.

When men shall go out to the sea for turtle catching, the women would be at the shore preparing food for the men. But if someone happen to catch a big snake; it would be presented to the chief. Snakes are often found near the coastal area of our beaches.

If there is a ceremony which is about to take place, every chiefs would saying that it will be a good ceremony because dishes of snakes would be prepared.

All the snakes which are brought are cooked in the open fire or TAVU. This are done by the women of the village. The fish are usually done in the VAKALOLO manner.

- In Vutia their chiefly food is the snake, why is this so?
In Vutia there are types of food which the snakes like and they are present. There is large numbers. The people of Vutia thus eat snake.
- Is there any tabu for the people who eats the snakes?
The snakes are often eaten everyday. As for the turtles there is a season for the catch. No one is allowed to catch any turtles when the season is out. As for the snake, it can be eaten the day itis caught.
- You mentioned when the Tui Noco wants to eat some turtle, how you go about catching the turtle.....is any special net for it?

If we are to go fishing at any time; first of all we would present a yaqona to one man who is regarded to be the leader of the fisherman before going into the sea.

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I heard that this is a practise which is taken along by our ancestors. I heard that before the fisherman will go and check the net for the turtles, early next morning, they would make a yaqona ceremony to a man in the village. It is believed that, by this the catch would be abundant. I heard the man had recently died.

It is believed that if the fisherman would go to the sea without making the yaqona ceremony, their catch would not be many. But if the yaqona is done, turtles would be found in sixties or even seventies. I just couldn't explain how those numbers of turtle caught were possible.

When the fisherman will go for the checking, they would have to swim to where the net is. Of course, the catch will be there if the ways is right traditionally.

- You mentioned about the presenting of yaqona to the man. Could you explain what is the significance of the yaqona? This is a practise which is done from our early great grand-fathers until today. They would present the yaqona to this particular man. I heard that this particular man is about a hundred or so years old. This shows how much such a spiritual power he got. Everytime a presentation is done, the fisherman is rest asure that the catch would be abundant.
- What happens when the turtles are caught, could you carry on from there.....?

When we would reached the mouth of the reef, we would see that the nets had been submerged in the water. We would .

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inform the leader about this, and thus we would know that the turtle are in there. We would wait until the leader of the fisherman ordered that it is time for the turtles to be brought up.

- What happens when the fisherman goes for catching fish?
If the DAUNCCO ordered for the catching of fish, there would certainly be fish. The fisherman believed that there would be abundant of fish if it recommended from the DAUNCCO. They believed that as long as they will obey they superior and their path is traditionally right, there is no reason why fish should not be caught in very large numbers. Every now and then, the fisherman would blow his conch when a turtle is caught. The more the turtle is caught, the more the blowing of conch would be. Everybody at the shore would know that a turtle is caught by the sounding of the conch.
- With every catch that we brought forth and make into the feast, we the fisherman would not participate in the feast. We would not eat any fish or turtle or even any sea food when the chiefs or elder are at sight. This tabu of eating when someone of the other side is present is termed as the VEITABANI. We would just sit there and watch the people or the elders of the village, eating what we had brought forth.
- Please could you tell me more about this relationship or the VEITABANI?

The VEITABANI is a very strong and close relationship.

It is like a relationship between a brother and a sister.

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Some will mention that Noco(village) has got this relationship with another neighbouring village. This shows that the two village are VEITABANI. This kind of relationship is known to everyone in the early days, but very few today.

As for the people of the villages of Nukuni; they are regarded as the fisherman for the Tui Rewa.

As for us, the people of Naivilaca, we are the fisherman for the Tui Noco. All villages know their relationship and their duties to another village.

- Is there any strong relationship which is still happening today like wise the VEITABANI?

In this VEITABANI relationship, the food factor is often comes first. The people from the sea or the fisherman is not allowed to touch their own food when the people of the land is at sight. Like wise the people of the land would not touch their food-crops when the fisherman is at sight. When a fish is caught, it is taken for the chiefs and this include the snake too.

THANK YOU.